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ABSTRACT

The Allegany County School System and the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD) have collaborated to develop a satellite program that brings MSD educational services to hard-of-hearing and deaf elementary students in rural western Maryland. In the past 5 years, the number of hearing-impaired preschoolers in Allegany and Garrett Counties increased such that a satellite elementary program became feasible. Parents expressed their desire to keep their children at home rather than sending them to MSD at kindergarten age. The Maryland State Department of Education provided technical assistance and financial support culminating in a Memorandum of Understanding between the three agencies in October 1993. Under this agreement, Allegany County School System provides the physical plant facilities and school resources for the satellite program, supervises daily program operations, grants release time to personnel to attend MSD inservice training, provides transportation for Allegany County children to attend appropriate activities at MSD's Frederick campus, and arranges agreements with neighboring school districts that would like to enroll students in the program. MSD provides consultation services, outreach support services to families of preschool hearing-impaired children, technical assistance, assessment services, funding for one satellite teacher position, and assistance with presenting American Sign Language instruction to primary regular education students and staff. In the third year of the program, evidence of program success is found in student progress and parent satisfaction. Key components for program replication and long-range plans for the satellite program are discussed. (SV)

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DEVELOPING A SATELLITE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS RESIDING IN A RURAL SETTING

History and Background

The Allegany County School System and the Maryland School for the Deaf, in cooperation with the parents of deaf and hard of hearing children residing in the rural area of Western Maryland, have developed a satellite educational program. It is the position of the Allegany County School System and the Maryland School for the Deaf that the deaf and hard of hearing children residing in Western Maryland should be served by each of these agencies in a mutually supportive manner. This satellite program is representative of a collaboration effort that has provided a new service delivery option for children and their families. It is innovative in that together these agencies provide professional services to children who would otherwise have been required to leave home to obtain the educational services of the Maryland School for the Deaf. With the development of the satellite program, the Maryland School for the Deaf is bringing its educational services to the rural community. This collaborative model services students from two school districts and includes a collaborative funding mechanism.

This program came into being as the result of dialogue between the the two school systems and the parents of the deaf children residing in Allegany and Garrett counties. Allegany County and MSD have had a long history of informal collaboration beginning with children served through the Allegany County Infants and Toddlers program and theFamily Education/Early Intervention Department of MSD. Within the last three to five years the population of deaf and hard of hearing preschoolers in the two counties increased to the point where it was possible to establish a satellite of this nature. Several parent meetings, which were jointly hosted by Allegany County and MSD, gave the parents the opportunity to express their desires to have their children remain at home rather than sending their children to MSD when they reached kindergarten age.

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Allegany County and MSD listened to the needs of these parents and began discussions to develop a satellite program. The Maryland State Department of Education provided technical assistance and financial support which culminated in a Memorandum of Understanding among the three agencies which was signed on October 6, 1993. The satellite program is in its third year of implementation; the Memorandum of Understanding is reviewed annually and is modified as needed.

Responsibilities and Contributions of the Participating Agencies

ALLEGANY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

1. The Allegany County School System will provide the physical plant facilities required to house a satellite program for deaf and hard of hearing children in Western Maryland. The program will be located at Cash Valley Elementary School. Classroom supplies and materials required to meet the students' needs will be provided. Curriculum decisions will be made jointly by Allegany County personnel and personnel from the Maryland School for the Deaf. Curriculum selected for use in the program will enable students to participate in typical classes in Allegany County schools or transfer to the Maryland School for the Deaf.

2. The satellite deaf and hard of hearing education class located in Allegany County will be afforded all school resources provided in the school.

3. Allegany County will supervise the day to day operations of the satellite program. Allegany County will assign support personnel to the program in order to ensure the provision of procedural safeguards under IDEA and COMAR 13A.05.01.

4. The Allegany County Board of Education will grant release time for personnel assigned to the satellite program to participate in MSD inservice training. Mileage and expenses for personnel to participate in inservice training will be covered by the local school system.

5. The LSS of students enrolled in the satellite program will engage in a cooperative exchange of information with MSD in order to ensure the quality of the program provided in this setting.

6. The Allegany County School System will provide transportation for the deaf and hard of hearing children enrolled in the satellite program who are Allegany County residents to go to the Frederick campus of the Maryland School for the Deaf for evaluations and other education activities as deemed appropriate.

7. The Allegany County School System will enter into an interagency agreement with other LSS's wishing to place students in the satellite program to ensure that the county of residency will provide transportation for their students to the satellite program, that they will provide visual, audio and adaptive equipment required for the student's participation in the program, that the provision of transportation for evaluations or trips to the Frederick campus of the Maryland School for the Deaf will be each county's responsibility and that the payment of per pupil costs as described in the regulations for students attending an educational program in a county other than their county of residency will follow the procedures found in COMAR 4-120.1

MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

1. The Maryland School for the Deaf will provide consultation services to the satellite deaf and hard of hearing education program located in Western Maryland.

2. Families of deaf and hard of hearing children participating in the satellite program will continue to receive outreach support services from MSD staff, until the child's fifth birthday. Family support groups will be co-sponsored with Allegany County for any parent of a deaf and/or hard of hearing child residing in Western Maryland.

3. The Maryland School for the Deaf will provide technical assistance on site or at the Maryland School for the Deaf to the teacher and other personnel assigned to the satellite program as needed.

4. The Maryland School for the Deaf will make available assessment services to the students assigned to the satellite program.

5. The Maryland School for the Deaf will fund a satellite teacher position for the 1995-96 school year.

6. The Maryland School for the Deaf will request in their FY 97 budget an allocation to fund a teaching position for the satellite program.

7. The Maryland School for the Deaf will provide assistance with presenting American Sign Language Instruction (ASL) to primary regular education students and staff in an integrated setting.

8. Students enrolled in the satellite program will meet Maryland School for the Deaf admissions criteria.

1. The MSDE will continue to provide technical assistance and ongoing support to the satellite deaf and hard of hearing education program located in Western Maryland.

Replication of the Model

Several key components must be in place in order for a model satellite program to be successful. Because the Allegany County Public Schools and MSD already had collaborated informally for many years, a good relationship was already established. This allowed the two agencies to comfortably discuss ways to implement a model such as this. The parents felt free to bring up their concerns to both agencies through a series of parent meetings; this allowed the two agencies to develop a program that addressed the needs of the children and their parents. This allowed us to form a partnership with the parents. Another component was the fact that there was an adequate population of students of similar age and abilities to establish a class.

Allegany County and MSD both required that the proposed satellite class be taught by a certified teacher of the deaf and that the students would receive the same curricula and related services that they would receive at a school for the deaf. Instructional assistants who have fluent communication skills are present with the children throughout the day; this enhances the instructional program and encourages language development. As part of MSD's technical assistance, Allegany County personnel received instruction and materials on communication strategies. The families also received instruction and sign language materials to help them to communicate with their children. Parents in the program also have the opportunity to participate in parent meetings focused on issues relating to deafness.

The Allegany County satellite personnel, the parents and the students in the satellite class periodically visit MSD's campus for exposure to deaf culture. The children in the satellite program have the opportunity to interact with deaf students of similar age at the Frederick campus. This will help the children and the families to become more familiar with the school and the deaf community, and will assist them in making a potential transition to MSD upon the desire of the parents.

Regular contact between the participating agencies must be maintained in order to keep the cooperative relationship viable. Each agency has expertise in different areas. By combining our expertise and our resources, we are better equipped to offer appropriate services to the students and their families. MSD sends their instructional representatives to visit in the classroom to provide technical support and to monitor students' progress. This allows the Allegany County personnel to request support, materials, and ideas in person; it also allows MSD personnel to

make suggestions after observing and participating in classroom activities. Another part of the technical assistance offered by MSD is the assessment of the students by personnel who are trained specifically to work with deaf students. Results are shared with the school personnel and the families.

Allegany County provided an appropriate classroom environment which allowed for special instruction but also gave the opportunity for the deaf students to be integrated with hearing students for some subjects and during various activities. Appropriate related services are also provided by Allegany County personnel on site such as speech therapy, audiological services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, assistive technology, physical education, media, art and psychological services. Allegany County personnel and MSD personnel communicate with each other on a regular basis; this interaction fosters collaboration.

Student Success

Students' progress is monitored by personnel from both agencies. The parents have the option of having their children assessed by qualified examiners at MSD upon request at any time. The students are in their third year of this satellite program. The students are proud to share their work and their accomplishments with their classroom teacher and with MSD visitors. Students are placed in the class based on MSD's admission criteria. The expectation is that the students will follow a regular graded curriculum. Our test results and our observations of the students while they are in their satellite classroom demonstrate that the students are progressing appropriately for their age level. When the students integrate with their hearing peers for part of the day, they are able to match the performance of their hearing peers.

Parents are regularly informed about their child's progress and are encouraged to visit and participate in their child's education. The participation and support of parents is a key component in making the satellite program successful.

Parent Opinion

The parents have expressed to personnel from both agencies their satisfaction and their pleasure in having the satellite provided for several reasons. The satellite idea came about because the parents wanted their children to stay home longer. This gave the parents more time to establish communication with their children and to be actively involved in their county school. It also gave the parents the opportunity to meet and to learn from each other. This provided support to the families and the children.

The parents also recognized the need to have regular contact with MSD so that they and their children would be exposed to the deaf community, and to develop a relationship with families of other deaf children throughout the state of Maryland. The parents appreciate the opportunity to visit the campus and to meet additional

personnel who are familiar with deafness. Parents were reassured to find that MSD's curriculum would mesh with the Allegany County curriculum in the various content areas so that their children would receive an academic education.

Parents have a unique opportunity to take advantage of the resources of both programs. Parents have become more astute in advocating for their own children. The parents of the children in this satellite program have been involved since the very beginning so they feel a sense of ownership. They are an important part of the team. The parents have been and continue to be actively involved in the day to day operation of the satellite program.

Long Range Plans For The Satellite Program

These long range plans will be implemented with the cooperation of the Allegany County School System, the Maryland School for the Deaf and the Maryland State Department of Education.

1. Parent meetings will be scheduled to discuss the educational needs of their children as they transition from a primary level (Pre K - 3rd grade) program to an intermediate level (grades 4 to 5) program. Exploring the educational opportunities afforded students who attend the Frederick Campus of the Maryland School for the Deaf will be included in the discussions.

2. Community support, through other agencies, will be identified and enhanced for use by the students in the satellite program and their families. The Allegany County Services Reform Initiative will act as the catalyst for this endeavor.

3. Educational field trips will be scheduled throughout each school year in conjunction with shared curriculum objectives for the students in the satellite program with the students at the Frederick Campus of the Maryland School for the Deaf.

4. The use of distance learning technology will be explored to determine its feasibility for enhancing the educational exchange between the satellite program and the Maryland School for the Deaf.

Rural Focus

The satellite program enables deaf and hard of hearing children residing in Western Maryland to participate in the outstanding educational program offered by the Maryland School for the Deaf without having to leave their community. This program provides a service delivery option that is family-focused and child-centered. The format used to develop this program enhances the rural community's ability to better serve deaf and hard of hearing children while at the same time supporting the family

unit. The format could be replicated in an rural community in collaboration with their state school for the deaf through a Memorandum of Understanding.